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U.S. probing leaks of plans to undermine Kadafi

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WASHINGTON — The Reagan administration has begun an apparently broad investigation of leaks to the press of secret intelligence reports discussing a plan to weaken the regime of Libya's leader, Col. Muammar el Kadafi.

The Justice Department's Internal Security Section reportedly is leading the probe, with actual investigation being done by FBI agents.

A White House spokesman said the administration would pursue the investigation "to the end" and could use polygraph tests to learn the source of disclosures of secret information.

In addition, leaders of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence announced that the panel had begun its own internal inquiry into any possible committee role in the disclosures, even though there was "no indication that the Senate committee had compromised any sensitive intelligence information."

The leak surfaced over the weekend when *The Washington Post* quoted from secret papers on a plan for a covert operation to undermine the Kadafi regime.

The White House spokesman, Larry M. Speakes, said that the administration inquiry would "use a number of ways" to probe the source of the disclosures, and he noted that an executive order governing intelligence operations "does permit polygraphs" to be used in inquiries.

Lie-detector tests are authorized for government employees under a 1982 presidential directive, and disciplinary action could be taken against an employee who refused to take a test. Members of Congress and their aides, however, could not be forced to take lie-detector tests.

The intelligence panels have primary responsibility for overseeing intelligence agencies and in authorization of covert operations. However, other members of Congress are permitted access to secret data.

Chairman David Durenberger, R-Minn., of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who suggested that the committee inquiry might be completed within 48 hours, said of the leak, "I think it came from inside the administration someplace. . . . It usually happens from their side, not ours."

Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., who is not a member of the intelligence panel, condemned the Libya disclosures, saying the possible leak of secret material was "a complete outrage." He said that any member of Congress involved in a leak of secret information should be censured "or actually expelled."

It is unclear, at this point, whether the government probe will lead to criminal charges. A number of probes of press leaks have been made in the past, and no criminal prosecution resulted.

However, the leak and its investigation comes right after the Reagan administration won a major test case in Baltimore last month, with the conviction of a Navy intelligence analyst, Samuel L. Morison, for handing over secret documents and photographs to a British publication.

Although members of Congress and their aides generally enjoy immunity to official investigations for their legislative actions, the Supreme Court has made clear that the lawmakers and aides may be investigated about possible criminal conduct.

In a 1972 ruling, in a case involving Alaska Sen. Mike Gravel's public disclosure of the contents of the secret "Pentagon Papers" study of the Vietnam War, the court said that constitutional immunity to investigation or prosecution would not apply if a member engaged in "republication of classified papers" in violation of federal law.

Correspondent Robert Timberg of The Sun's Washington Bureau contributed to this article.

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